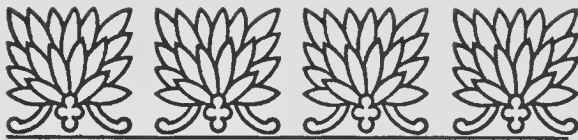




THE FROZEN PRIEST OF PEMBINA





THE FROZEN PRIEST OF PEMBINA

GREETINGS
TO

By
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FOREWORD

It is very gratifying to me to learn that Mrs. MacLeod intends to publish her story of "The Frozen Priest of Pembina" in a booklet as that will make it more widely available to the reading public.

The story is well and vividly told and possesses great interest for me personally, and that for several reasons. In the first place, because one of the rescuers was my uncle, Hugh Pritchard, and the other my oldest brother, John P. Matheson.

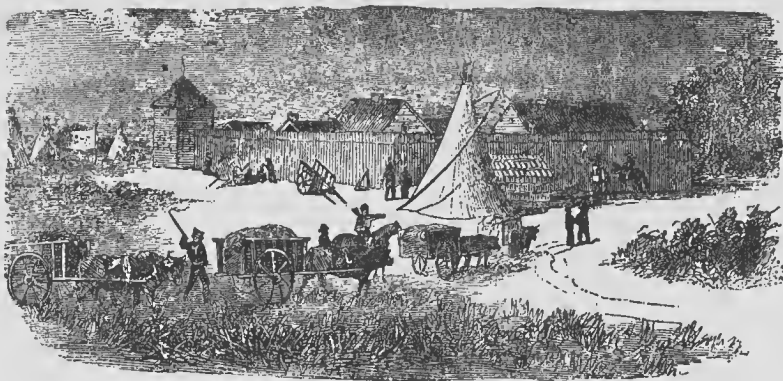
In the second place, because I recall the fact that, as a young lad seven years old, I rode on horseback on what was then called "The St. Paul Road" away beyond St. Boniface, to meet my uncle and brother on their return and heard from their own lips the story of the rescue. It can easily be imagined how the exciting record fired my youthful imagination and left itself indelibly imprinted in my memory.

In the third place, I remember how in 1876 I was in St. Paul, Minnesota and had the pleasure of meeting Father Goiffon. I happened to be in Mr. Kittson's store when a well-conditioned and healthy looking priest entered on crutches and throwing himself up on the counter of the store, was introduced to me.

When he understood who I was, he seized my hand in both of his and exclaimed, "You are the nephew of one of my rescuers, and the brother of the other. Tell them that you have seen me and that I am well and fervently thankful to them for saving my life."

S. P. MATHESON, Archbishop.

Winnipeg, November 30th, 1935



WITH a quick lift of the big wooden latch, Father Goiffon opened the door and eagerly entered his log house in the hamlet of St. Joseph. In the flood of sunlight which fell across the room and rested on a rough table under a dim parchment covered window, his eyes found what they sought, what he had hoped for—letters and papers besides his books. The mail had come!

He stood out sharply in the light; small and slender in his clerical garb, opening the letters and short-sightedly holding them near. He was over thirty, but with still the smooth fresh cheeks of early youth, and the fine lines about his eyes lent humor when he smiled. His neighbors Paul and Charles Morneau had insisted on unhitching his oxen for him, so he had come directly into the house. All three had just returned from two months at the buffalo hunt and the summer air was filled with the harsh screeching of Red River carts going on past St. Joe to Pembina.

In the previous year—1859—shortly after his arrival from France, Father Goiffon had been sent to take Father Belcourt's parish of Pembina, N. Dak., but the Sioux having burned all the Pembina church property, he administered the parish from St. Joe on its western boundary forty miles away. The country seemed boundless in its immensity; the life, primitive and wild, almost frightening. But Father Goiffon had a stout heart, and cheerfully met difficulty and hardship in ministering to these French and Métis, whose need

(1) This is a true story and the first time that an authentic account of the occurrence, in detail, has been published. Rev. A. G. Morice, O.M.I., who mentions the incident, in passing, in his *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*, has given me much information concerning it. Archbishop Matheson of the Anglican Church, has shared his personal recollections with me; the "Johnny" of the story was his brother. "Johnny" himself, in later years, was my neighbor, and I have had the tale from his lips many times. The maid in the Palace kitchen only recently died in Winnipeg. I have also had the benefit of Father Goiffon's own account as given to friends.

M. A. MacL.

had touched him while still in far-away France. He enjoyed the freedom of the life and had grown to love the simple grateful souls he shepherded. Only Nature, cruel relentless Nature, on whom they all depended and whose fickleness often brought tragedy, chilled his heart.

And now after his long absence, he was glad to be home and he was eager for news from the outside world. He read the letters from France first, changing emotions playing over his face; then laying them down, he picked up one post-marked St. Paul. Reading this, his face became grave and he read it again. It was from his Vicar General, Monsignor Ravoux, requesting his presence in St. Paul on matters concerning his parish—an unwelcome summons. He must go again on two more months of travel!

A small fire burned in the fire-place, lighted by his good neighbor Madame Morneau on hearing the noise of returning carts, so that he might have tea quickly. A pot of water hung ready over it, but tea forgotten, the priest sat down on the bench by the fireplace.

He was weary. His life on the hunt had been a busy one. Among the vast numbers congregated there, he had watched as a father over his people; prayers in the morning before the men left camp for the farther prairies, instruction in the elements of religion to the women and children during the day, and a talk or sermon to all again at night, with Sunday the busiest day of all. He had his carts at the hunt, as well, to procure his own supply of meat and pemmican, the country's sole means of subsistence.

After camping so long on the bare prairies, his sheltering walls seemed a haven. His glance swept the room. Only here in all this lonely country, was there any link with the established cultured life he had left in France; a few religious pictures on the wall, writing materials, his books and papers on the table. It was a poor home of but one room, twelve feet square, but Father Goiffon loved it and was proud of it, for he had built it himself—the neighbors helping only with the heavy logs.

A six-year university course in the classics and a two-year course in philosophy had not contributed much to his knowledge of building, though it may have had a bearing on the size of his one window, which was unusually large for those regions. The logs were poorly chinked, the window and door were roughly done and the mud floor was too soft and uneven. But the chimney was his masterpiece, constructed of hay and clay well plastered, with a good draw.

The rough table and bench were the only furniture, his traveling box serving also as a seat. At night a buffalo robe doubled on the floor by the fireplace served as a bed, with heavy blankets to cover him.

Living was simple enough. Madame Morneau kept his house clean, occasionally contributing bannock when flour was procurable, and he did his own cooking.

Suddenly it all seemed luxurious and his eyes rested longingly on his books. He must leave it; he must go again with the carts—and on a dangerous journey. There were no roads, only tracks hard to follow over the vast plains, which crossed, moreover, the country of the hostile and warlike Sioux. But Father Goiffon feared treacherous weather more than savage Indian; always in this new life Nature loomed threateningly in the background.

But the Vicar General's summons must be obeyed, and Father Goiffon, busily planning, suddenly realized that his dream of a window sash with glass need be a dream no longer, he could get one in St. Paul! He would have light in his house the coming winter! With his poor eyesight the dim light through the parchment had been a sore trial. And a horse! He could get a young horse on which to travel the long distances of his parish, one to replace Father Belcourt's slow old mare to which he had fallen heir.

He must go at once! It was nearing the end of August and there was only time to get to St. Paul and return before winter set in. Such a trip with carts must be finished before chance of storms and snow. He knew that the Morneau brothers planned to join a party shortly going to St. Paul, so, still with no thought of tea, he got up and went over to the Morneau home. He would arrange to travel with them.

On a morning in the last week of August St. Joseph was awakened early by the noise of a departing cart train. Father Goiffon came out of Paul Dubois' house. The old man was very ill and the priest was loath to leave him, for he had not been so devout and attentive to his religious duties as his pastor could have wished. However, Father Goiffon had done all he could and had administered the last Sacraments of the Church before he left.

The carts were waiting, the ox of the second cart hitched to the back of the first, so Father Goiffon mounted immediately; he was driving his own carts. Pulling his French hat down to shade his eyes they moved off, farewells from cart and doorway mingling with creaks and loud calls to the oxen.

The day was fine and clear and they covered twenty miles the first day. At Pembina where they joined a larger train, Father Goiffon visited young Pierre Leroux who was ill of consumption, and he came back to the carts looking much moved.

They traveled along by the Red River, over flat country, presently leaving the river and going farther west, soon coming to the most difficult part of the whole journey, the "Grand Traverse," as

it was called. The road lay nineteen miles over a stretch of swampy country, with tall grass reaching in places to the oxen's backs.

They must pass over the Grand Traverse without making camp, carrying wood and water for the midday meal on the carts. Inexperienced travelers lost oxen here, for there was danger of becoming mired and in hot summer weather the road was so heavy for oxen with loaded carts, that traders travelled it at night. Father Goiffon's party started over at break of day proceeding carefully and made camp late that same night at Little Salt River.

Day after day they traveled, the monotony broken only by difficult places along the road. There were thirteen rivers between Pembina and St. Paul, some of which could not be crossed by fording. Over some, they found bridges left by travelers ahead of them; at others they had to fell trees and build their own. But even rivers that could be forded sometimes presented difficulties. The Goose River was a clear running stream, shallow and wide, but in a gorge with banks so high that it required eight or more men on each wheel to get a heavily loaded cart down one side and up the other.

The Sioux were most feared in the region about Fort Abercrombie. In 1862—two years later—they wiped out nearly all the white people in that part of the country, but now Father Goiffon's party passed in safety and with no alarms.

After reaching St. Cloud, St. Paul soon appeared in the distance,



and on arrival at its outskirts, they made camp with others already there, hobbling their oxen as usual to graze. The priest then went into the town to stay at the Bishop's Palace as arranged.

Next day at the camping place, Father Goiffon and the Morneaus met some Red River people, Sam and Hugh Pritchard with their nephew Johnny Matheson, an eager lad of nineteen; and they planned to make the return journey together. They would leave in the first week of October, giving Father Goiffon a ten days' stay in St. Paul.

During that time he found a horse much to his liking, a fine four-year-old. He also made his purchases; things for his church, a few for himself including the window sash, and had them all well packed in his carts.

Much of his time was spent in business at the Palace, and when the day set for departure arrived, he was obliged to send word to the camp that he was unable to leave. He suggested that if the Morneaus would wait with him, they would follow the next day and soon catch up to the larger party. So the Red River people went on.

Early next morning, as planned, the Morneaus having arranged the priest's carts with their own, they set off, Father Goiffon riding alongside on his fine horse. They made good progress the first day, expecting soon to reach the party ahead. It was warm glorious autumn weather, which was fortunate as in mistake they had let their tent go ahead with the other carts and were obliged to sleep in the open.

Then, a driver having neglected to look after his axle while in St. Paul, it gave way and they were halted a day to make a new one. They hastened on, but at the end of a week's travel they had not come in sight of those ahead.

After passing New Richardson another delay occurred. A quite new wheel on another cart went to pieces and it took them some time to repair it. About two hours before sunset, the other new wheel on the same cart did the same thing and they found that the axle was at fault.

As each delay had occurred, Father Goiffon's anxiety at his lengthening absence increased. His parishioners were now for over two months without a priest; no one to say the Mass on Sunday, no one to baptize, no one to attend the old and dying. Paul Dubois and Pierre Leroux might be needing him badly—they might be past needing him! Poor Pierre had shed tears when they parted.

He could not help voicing his anxiety, and that night he told his companions that he had made a decision—he was going to leave them and push forward more quickly on his horse. "The weather is fine

and warm," he said. "My horse, as you know, is a good traveler, and I feel sure that I can reach Pembina in four days' time. I can delay no longer."

"But you cannot go on alone, Father," said Paul Morneau, the older brother, "you cannot carry what travel requires; you cannot—"

"My poor souls in need are calling me," broke in the priest, "I must go on!"

Charles joined his brother in protest. "But Father, if the weather should change, you are not dressed warmly enough to travel on a horse, you have only summer clothing. Pray, stay with the carts."

But even the threat of dreaded Nature could not change him from his purpose—his people needed him. "The weather cannot change so quickly," he said with a glance around, "I will be in Pembina before that happens." So, on Tuesday, taking a small food supply for four days, and refusing more from their store which had dwindled through the delays, the priest left his companions and started off on his horse.

The whole of October had been exceptionally fine. There are autumns in the West, when the weather keeps clear and warm without interruption so late that it seems each fine day must be the last, that it cannot continue; finally ending in a quick change of temperature, snow, extreme cold and a furious and dangerous blizzard.

The Moreaus were fearing this; also they hesitated to suggest to the gallant little priest that he was too inexperienced, too new in the country to go on alone. "God grant that the fine weather may hold. If it changes, what will become of him!" said Paul, as they watched him out of sight.

His new horse travelled well, and at sunset the priest, perceiving a pin point of light ahead in the distance on the edge of some bush, went on to find a solitary Métis camped for the night. They slept together on beds of leaves, by the fire.

The next evening Father Goiffon reached Red Lake River and had the good fortune to meet one of his own Métis named Demarais, who was also camped alone. He found Demarais' news disquieting—a sickness was abroad and many of his parishioners were ill. Paul Dubois was dead, and Pierre Leroux, not far from the end, was holding to life to see his beloved priest once again. The travelers talked long in the warmth of the fire and slept that night by a clump of willows exactly where the city of Grand Forks stands to-day.

Next day was All Saints' Day, November 1st. The priest more than ever impatient to reach Pembina, left Demarais early in the morning and went on, adding to the little food he had left, a handful of hawthorn berries given him by the halfbreed. All day he traveled in

warmth and sunshine thinking of the Morneaus' foolish fears about the weather. Late that night he went forward to a large fire he saw on the banks of the Great Salt River. He had caught up with the Red River party at last!

They gave him a warm welcome, but were surprised to find him alone. He was chilled from the night air, so they made him hot tea, while he sat by the fire and told them of the Morneaus' mis-haps, and of his anxiety to reach Pembina.

After having slept on the ground for two nights, and being so long without a tent, he enjoyed the comfort of the camp, and slept that night with the Prichards in their tent, on a fine bed of boughs.

When they awakened in the morning they were disturbed to find that rain had set in, but the priest was still eager to press on. His hosts, however, were anxious that he should not go on alone. He was lightly and unsuitably clad for such a journey at that time of year; a summer cassock, a light-weight capote, French boots and his French hat. Moreover with the rain, the Grand Traverse would be dangerous for an inexperienced traveler. So they tried to persuade him to wait and go with them, but he would not.

"The rain will soon be over; I must go," he said. "My horse travels quickly and I will reach Pembina to-night." The best they could do was to get him to promise that if the rain continued he would halt in the small bush at Little Salt River, ten miles farther on, and wait for them there—he must not travel the Grand Traverse alone.

"A daft lad," muttered Hugh Pritchard as he turned away, and while they harnessed their oxen, the priest started off in the rain.

His horse covered the ten miles to Little Salt River in good time, but the light clothing on his limbs was wet through. Nevertheless, though chilled by his wet clothes, and the country ahead hidden by a forbidding wall of steady rain, he was still tempted to go on. Duty urged him, and the picture of poor Pierre clinging to life till he should come, was almost too much for him, for he thought—little knowing the Grand Traverse in bad weather—that by traveling on steadily, he would reach home by night. However, he had made his promise and resigned himself to wait.

"The Pritchards will not be long in coming up," he thought, "and in the meantime I will dry myself." So he set about gathering wood and lit a fire. He then made a small shelter in the trees against the rain, and tried to dry his clothing. All day he waited, chafing at the delay. Night came and still alone, he covered his horse and went to sleep by the fire.

When he wakened next morning it was to find with dismay that

the rain had changed to snow. A heavy white blanket, eight or ten inches deep, lay over everything, blown into long ridges by a sharp northwest wind. He was too inexperienced to understand the real gravity of his situation but he was anxious at the turn things had taken.

What would he do? He had wasted Friday unnecessarily, he thought; and there was only one day left in which to reach Pembina by Sunday, as he had determined. He had only a few handfuls of frozen hay for his horse, his beautiful horse! What would become of him, now his food on the ground was covered with snow! He was a horse of the towns, he would not search beneath the snow for grass as would one bred to the prairies.

"And I am not much better off myself," he thought, "a few fragments of pemmican and Demarais' handful of 'Cenelles.' I cannot maintain a fire. It was difficult enough last night in the rain, to pick up wood, but now with the snow, I will have none." So he decided to wait no longer—the Red River party must have had some misfortune—he would go on.

Putting on his fire the last bits of wood, he endeavored to dry his horse's cover, which he had found under it's feet when he awakened. Then, knowing that in such a storm he could not say his breviary on horseback as previously, he said short prayers, committing himself to God's care and started off over the Grand Traverse.

The storm was blinding. The horse turned his head from it several times as though wanting to turn back, then faced it and went on bravely. And with some small indications to point the way, the priest felt that they were going in the direction of the summer road.

Several times during the day the horse was halted by heavy ground, then resting a little, went on. But toward dark, having traveled all day in swamp and snow with so little food it seemed he could go no further. The priest, however, although knowing, through tales he had heard, of the danger of traveling at night without roads in a storm over those vast prairies, still urged the horse on, for he thought he must now be nearing his own part of the country. In reality he had covered but a short distance from the morning's starting point. Presently they got into a bad bit of swamp and were forced to stop. The horse was mired.

The night before, in the shelter of the bush, Father Goiffon had carefully covered his poor horse. Now, in his agitation over the position in which he found himself, and being far spent, he completely forgot to do so! Mechanically he took off the bridle and saddle and as usual, put the long rope round the poor beast's neck so that he should not stray—though he could not stir a foot! He took

the horse's cover and absent-mindedly folded it over the saddle and sat down on it, placing carefully beside him, his French hat for fear it might be injured! The poor horse with his back to the storm changed neither place nor position.

Later, in despair now that Nature had him defenseless in her clutches, the priest crept under his buffalo robe and went to sleep, not to waken until morning.

Once awake, he said short prayers, then remembered that Sunday had come and he was not in Pembina! He must go on! Stiff and dazed he tried to free himself from the accumulation of snow on the buffalo robe. His poor horse stirred a little on seeing him uncover himself. "We must continue our journey," the priest thought, "I must find my hat and go on." But the hat had disappeared under the snow and as an icy crust had formed, he injured all his knuckles before abandoning the search.

"I have no hat, no mitts; I cannot travel farther while this weather lasts," he decided. Then suddenly recollecting too, that his horse could not move, he sadly covered himself up again. He slept till darkness came, wakened, and was so hungry that he ate the last of the hawthorn berries and went to sleep again.

Next morning tragedy awaited him—his horse of whom he had been so proud, was dead. In sorrow, he crept again under the buffalo robe and again went to sleep, not to waken till the following day at dawn. He had no idea of time except darkness and daylight, but he knew that it was now the fourth day of the storm. Presently he fancied that it was abating. "My poor horse is dead and I am alone," he said to himself, "but I must go on."

Making a parcel of his breviary, his horse's bridle and cover, he prepared to do so, but his feet refused to hold him. Surprised, he then realized that they were frozen—they had frozen while he slept! . . . What would he do now? He would have to wait till some one found him. In his extreme condition he did not grasp the fact that he was in a desperate plight, but got once again under his sheltering robe to wait, quite confident that some one would come!

The storm continued and it was getting colder. It was so easy to sleep. At times when he awakened and lifted the robe moist from contact with his body, to see if anyone had come, it froze so hard that it would not fold about him, leaving open spaces through which the wind and snow blew in.

As time wore on, he realized that he was done for, unless in answer to his prayers, God sent some one to his rescue. He then remembered that when starting on the trip Madame Morneau had said, "Take care, little Father, that nothing befalls you," for an

Indian medicine man at the Hunt had foretold that he would die without the Sacraments of the Church. So now he prayed, "Oh God, I know that Thou wilt not let that happen. Send some one, for I must get to Pembina to Pierre and my people."

Then recalling the devotion of his poor parishioners in times of stress, when they promised Masses for souls in Purgatory, he promised thirty-two in addition to the twenty-four assigned to him by his superiors when in St. Paul—if he ever got the opportunity of saying them.

Next morning he wakened confused, and, surprised to find that he was not in another world, he doubled the promised Masses for suffering souls. Benumbed with exposure and hunger he realized that his poor horse could furnish food to help preserve his life. He got his small knife from his pocket, pushed it in, and cutting off pieces of the animal, ate them ravenously. Then feeling much revived, he lay down beside the horse and went to sleep.

On waking he was now too benumbed and spent to pray. Followed intervals of eating and sleeping, and no knowledge of night or day. Waking, he would lift the robe to see if anyone had come to his rescue, then hopeless, his damp clothes freezing stiff with the cold, he would eat, and go to sleep again. . .

Came strange hallucinations. He called coaxingly to a beautiful child—but in vain; he would not come. He shouted frantically to men with strange horned animals, who only receded in the distance. He pleaded, his voice growing weaker, with one man who changed to a dozen, then back to one again . . . Everything was so far away . . . He continued calling, calling, to people who were borne, far up and away, floating off in the storm . . . Shouts, words, the sound of his own voice,—all floated peacefully away . . .

Then, after he had been for five days and nights out in the storm, "The Good Samaritans," as he afterward termed them, came.

The Red River party had suffered delays and coming to Little Salt River, they found that the priest had gone! He had started over the Grand Traverse alone!

They hastened on, hoping to find him, but they too were halted by the blizzard for those five days and nights, without a fire, with little food, and suffering great hardships.

At last on November 8th, the morning dawned clear and still and they prepared to move on. Helping his Uncle Hugh load the carts, young Johnny Matheson stopped and listened. "What is that noise?" he said. "It sounds like a man calling." But his uncle, anxious to go on, replied, "It is a wolf. We have no time for wolves. The wretched creature kept me awake in the night."

But the lad insisted, "It sounded like a man." Hearing it again he dropped the blankets he was putting in the cart, and raced off, his uncle following more cautiously with the gun. Once more the boy stopped and listened, then ran on again. He saw a dark heap ahead among the drifts of snow! Reaching it, he bent down for a moment, then waving his arms in excitement called, "'Tis a man! 'Tis a man! The priest; the priest!"

Hugh began to run. Johnny was down on his knees. Hugh ran faster. Soon kneeling too, by the huddled form against the dead horse, he gasped, "Father Goiffon!" The poor priest, in great extremity, was half frozen in the snow and delirious. As Hugh got down beside him, he held up a piece of his horse's flesh and said in a crazed way, "Have some. 'Tis good, 'tis good. Have some."

Shouts summoned the other men of the party. They tried to lift him but his clothing was frozen fast in the snow, and they had to cut it off, before they could get him out of his icy bed. Both feet and his right leg were badly frozen. Lying on his left side in the shelter of the horse, his left leg had not suffered so severely.

They wrapped him in blankets and carried him to their carts. He was in a sad state lying so long but they had no means of bathing him to make him more comfortable. They had no food to offer—they had had none since two days before. But on waking and finding the storm over, they had broken up a wooden case containing merchandise which they had been reserving for great emergency, and made a fire so as to have tea before continuing their journey. With what tea remained, they revived the poor priest and started off for Pembina.

A Red River cart is not a gentle vehicle, and the priest suffered greatly when his frozen limbs began to thaw. Finally within some miles of Pembina, Johnny Matheson ran ahead and brought back Joseph Rolette—a man of means and one of Father Goiffon's parishioners—with a light wagon and horses. They took the priest to the Rolette home, arriving that night, where every care was given him. They put his poor feet in a basin of snow, they rubbed his frozen limbs, and gave him hot soup.

Three weeks he lay there without a doctor. Gangrene set in and his sufferings were intense. Madame Rolette, sick at heart for the priest they all loved, waited on him constantly, daily seeing him grow worse. His parishioners hovered about the place, and Pierre Leroux still awaiting his friend, sent heartening messages—he must get well, they all needed him.

Then there arrived a messenger, Alexis Goulet, from the Red River Settlement, sixty miles north of Pembina. He said that Father Lestanc,—acting administrator of the Diocese of St. Boniface in Archbishop Tache's absence at the Northern Missions,—

hearing of Father Goiffon's condition and being near the doctors at Fort Garry, had sent him to bring the priest to St. Boniface.



The roads were fit for neither cart nor sleigh, so he brought him the three days' journey on a sledge—a trying ordeal for one so ill. Arrived at St. Boniface, he took him to the Bishop's Palace, where Father Lestanc and Sister Gosselin—housekeeper at the Palace,—both full of concern, took charge of him. He was put in a room opposite that of Bishop Tache's and next to Father Mestre's, and the doctors from the Fort were summoned. An operation was deemed imperative. They said his right leg must be amputated as soon as possible.

After a day's rest, the operation was performed and he rallied well. His condition immediately improved and on the eighth day the stitches were removed, the doctors expecting to operate on the left foot in a few days time.

Next day, however, there was a great alarm. Father Simonet, replacing Father Mestre, who after having been all night with Father Goiffon, was sleeping, came running to the kitchen: "Send Galarneau for the doctor! Father Goiffon is bleeding to death! Run! Run!" There was great rushing about, Father Lestanc coming from one direction, Sister Gosselin, with freshly torn sheets, coming from another. A large artery in the amputated leg had broken, resulting in severe hemorrhage. The doctors came quickly but all their efforts to check it were unavailing. A hasty consultation showed no possibility of saving the priest's life, for with the excessive loss of blood, he was too weak to attempt another operation higher up so as to tie the artery. At last the doctors said, "He hasn't an hour to live." Lying there white and spent he was told that his end was near. A solemn group gathered in the room, and the last rites of the Church were administered . . .

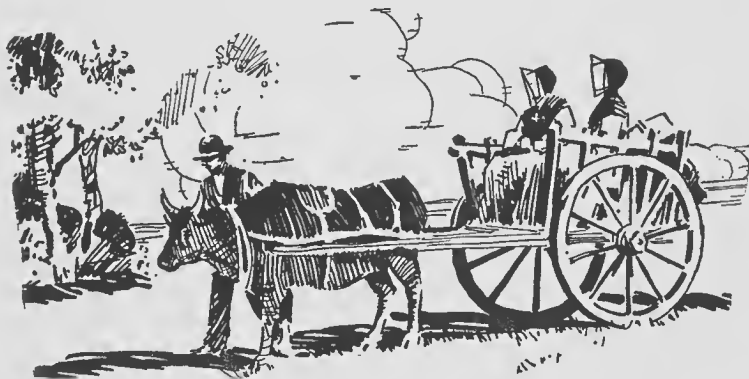
It was December 14th, an intensely cold and stormy day, twenty-five degrees below zero. To the dying man's ears came the sound of the howling wind. He was back on the prairies again,

the wind swirling the snow about him in swift enveloping death, and he thought, "The Great Doctor Who saved me there, can save me now even if it requires a miracle."

The capable Sister Gosselin had gone back to her kitchen, busied with the household needs of the day. "Men must live, as well as die," she sighed. She instructed her old servant Ursule, to put sixty pounds of buffalo grease in a large pot on the Three Rivers stove. "It is near Christmas; make candles for the holidays as well as for Father Goiffon's funeral," she said. "Poor man, he is dying quickly." Ursule obeyed, unthinkingly putting the lid of the pot on tightly.

Galarneau, the carpenter, then entered with lumber he wished to dry—a coffin would be needed. "Put it against the wall by the stove," Sister Gosselin said, "it will dry well there." The carpenter did so and then stood by the stove a few moments, warming himself and discussing Father Goiffon's tragic end, with Ursule.

Later they both went out and Sister Gosselin busied herself about the kitchen for a time. Then suddenly noticing the time on the big clock on the shelf, she went hastily out—she was to waken Father Mestre at ten!



Going along the corridor, she paused by Father Goiffon's room, and crossed herself. He lay motionless on the bed, Father Lestanc and Father Simonet sitting by him, awaiting the end. She knocked on Father Mestre's door and wakened him, then turning—a smell of smoke!—an alarming whiff! She ran speedily back to the kitchen to find it in flames! The grease had overflowed on the stove and nearby lumber which was ablaze, the flames leaping high and spreading rapidly.

Immediately the place was in a turmoil, people running frantically about, and warning cries of "Fire" resounded throughout

the Palace and Cathedral. Father Lestanc, with the sense of his heavy responsibility, rushed out of Father Goiffon's room. Father Goiffon half dozing, was roused by the shouts, and looking out saw thick smoke in the corridor. Father Mestre came running into the room saying to Father Simonet, "We must carry him out." "I am a lost man anyway," said Father Goiffon. "I may as well die burned, as frozen. Go, save something from His Grace's room." He knew that there was a priceless chalice there, given Bishop Provencher by Pope Gregory VI. But paying no heed, they carried him out on his thin mattress into the bitterly cold weather, and of necessity, laid him in the snow, then ran back to help get everyone out of the burning buildings. . .

"Once more," thought Father Goiffon, "I am out in the storm to die." But lying there awaiting his fate in the freezing blasts, he was presently conscious that the warmth of the hemorrhage had ceased, the limb felt cold, in fact he was becoming entirely benumbed on his icy bed. The miracle had happened! What medical skill could not do, the extreme temperature out of doors accomplished—the intense cold had stopped the hemorrhage, and Father Goiffon lived! By a strange turn of events, the very fierce elements of Nature which before had almost worked his destruction, now saved his life.

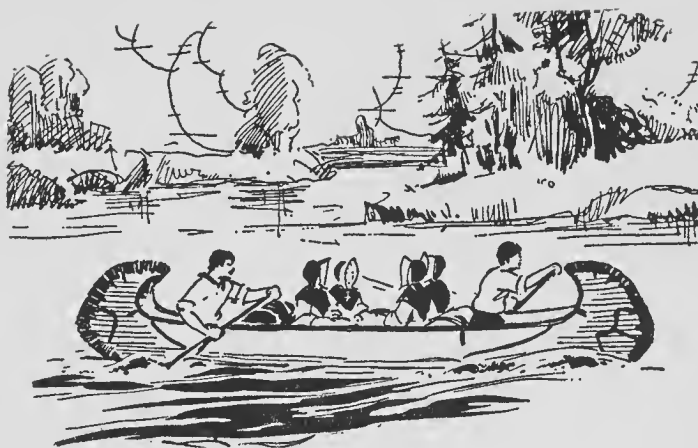
The Palace and Cathedral quickly burned to the ground and the priest's two rescuers came back to carry him, half frozen, some little distance to the shelter of the Convent. The doctors were amazed when they came, to find him living and decided to leave the mass of congealed blood and let Nature finish her work of healing.

"Nature my enemy, has been my savior," said Father Goiffon.

Later they operated successfully on his left foot and he made a good recovery, soon being able to discharge thankfully the promised Masses for the souls in Purgatory. In time, he returned, amid rejoicing, to Pembina and St. Joe, but remained only a short time before being removed to a less strenuous parish in Minnesota.

There he led a useful active life in the service of his Church until he was eighty-five; and it was a matter of keen pride to his independent spirit—one of which he used to boast—that he always made for himself the wooden leg he needed.

In 1908—forty-eight years afterward—at the blessing of the present magnificent St. Boniface Cathedral whose "turrets twain" replace those that were burned, there walked in the procession an old priest with a wooden leg and by the help of two canes, for part of his other foot was also missing. He had come from Minnesota by special invitation to take part in the ceremonies. It was Father Goiffon.



The Red River Voyageur

By John Greenleaf Whittier

Out and in the river is winding
The links of its long red chain,
Through belts of dusky pine-land
And gusty leagues of plain.

Only at times a smoke-wreath
With the drifting cloud-rack joins,
The smoke of the hunting-lodges
Of the wild Assiniboine!

Drearly blows the north wind
From the land of ice and snow;
The eyes that look are weary,
And heavy the hands that row.

And with one foot on the water,
And one upon the shore,
The Angel of Shadow gives warning
That day shall be no more.

Is it the clang of wild-geese?
Is it the Indian's yell,
That lends to the voice of the north
The tones of a far-off bell? ^[wind]

The voyageur smiles as he listens
To the sound that grows apace;
Well he knows the vesper ringing
Of the bells of St. Boniface—

The bells of the Roman Mission,
That call from their turrets twain,
To the boatman on the river,
To the hunter on the plain!

Even so in our mortal journey
The bitter north winds blow,
And thus upon life's Red River
Our hearts, as oarsmen, row.

And when the Angel of Shadow
Rests his feet on wave and shore,
And our eyes grow dim with watch-
And our hearts faint at the oar, ^[ing]

Happy is he who heareth
The signal of his release
In the bells of the Holy City,
The chimes of eternal peace!

BRANDON S. MITCHELL